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WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: IS_KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

11. Mideast
12. Iran: Nuclear Program

Key stories in the media:

Ha'aretz reported that Deputy National Security Advisor Elliott Abrams, who holds the "Israeli-Palestinian portfolio" in the White House, and David Welch, the "head of the State Department's Middle East desk," will visit Israel and the PA on Wednesday to prepare next month's Washington visits by PM Sharon and PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas. The newspaper says that among other issues, the two U.S. envoys will be discussing the progress of the disengagement plan, which Ha'aretz says the White House views as "the only game in town." The newspaper writes that for this reason, the U.S. administration has quietly agreed to Sharon's foot-dragging on evacuating illegal outposts in the West Bank.

On Sunday, Ha'aretz bannered the completion of an extensive aerial photography operation detailing the location and expansion of each settlement and outpost in the West Bank. The survey revealed that there has been extensive building in recent months.

Nigel Roberts, World Bank country director for the West Bank and Gaza, was quoted as saying in an interview with Jerusalem Post that Israel and the PA have not started discussing the final dispensation of homes and infrastructure in the Gaza Strip, even as the time needed to deal with the complex issues involved in transferring these assets is quickly running out.

Leading media reported that Israel and the PA failed to reach an agreement last night on the handover of security responsibility for Tulkarm to the PA, which was scheduled to take charge there today. Israel rejected the demand for control of nearby villages, which it says should be returned gradually and are the basis for attacks on Israeli targets. On Monday, Yediot reported that Shin Bet Director Avi Dichter secretly met in Amman on Friday to discuss the security

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talks between Israel and the PA so as to pave the way for the continued transfer of security responsibility over the West Bank cities to the Palestinian security forces. Abbas apprised Dichter of the understandings that were reached with the Palestinian factions in the Cairo summit meeting and presented the Palestinian demands that were being made of Israel so as to preserve these understandings. Jerusalem Post quoted Hamas's leader in the Gaza Strip as saying that his group has decided to participate in next July's election for the Palestinian Legislative Council in order to destroy the Oslo Accords and fight corruption in the PA.

On Sunday, Jerusalem Post quoted a source close to Sharon as saying that he decided over the weekend to move up the vote on the 2005 state budget from March 31 to March 30, or possibly even the day before, to avoid falling prey to a political ambush.

On Sunday, all media reported that only about 10,000 people attended a rally in support of disengagement on Saturday night in Tel Aviv. Contrary to expectations, organizers did not manage to bring out either their groups or speakers who are not identified with the peace camp.

Ha'aretz reported that residents of the Katif Bloc settlements in Gaza have given the security services the names of several extremists whom they believe might use violence during the evacuation this July, and that they asked the services to remove these people from their settlements. Yediot reported that A-G Menachem Mazuz has instructed that disengagement opponents who breach the law be punished more severely, proposing a sentence of up to 20 years imprisonment for highway obstructors. Leading media quoted senior defense sources as saying that Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz will turn the Gaza Strip into a closed military area before Passover (April 23). Jerusalem Post quoted a senior police officer as saying that settler attacks on Palestinians in Hebron are on the rise and that they are expected to escalate as the evacuation from the Gaza Strip draws closer. Ha'aretz reported that Sharon has rejected a proposal by Agriculture Minister Yisrael Katz that Israel announce that it does not intend to evacuate settler outposts set up before March 2001, in exchange for the Likud "rebels'" removing their opposition to the state budget. Israel Radio reported that the collaborators' village of Dahaniyeh in the southern Gaza Strip is to be evacuated and destroyed, and most of the collaborators will be moved to communities in Israel. The decision was taken at a high level meeting last week after a poll conducted in Dahaniyeh showed that most of the residents wished to leave the Gaza Strip. A senior source told the radio that the government will not abandon those who helped Israel over the years.

Yediot reported that the GOI has launched a plan to build thousands of homes to link Ma'aleh Adumim to the Green Line and Jerusalem (the E-1 corridor), as part of a giant plan under Sharon's personal supervision. The daily says that in the past few days the plan has passed from the theoretical to the practical stage. Jerusalem Post quoted Ramiro Cibrian-Uzal, the incoming EU Ambassador to Israel, as saying Sunday that a short-term lull was insufficient and that for peace to flourish, the Palestinian leadership had to be "proactive" in the battle against terrorism. On Sunday, Ha'aretz quoted EU sources as saying that the EU intends to offer Israel economic benefits in exchange for relieving the restrictions on the Palestinians.

Ha'aretz quoted Jordanian FM Hani al-Mulki as saying Sunday that Jordan's King Abdullah will not attend the upcoming Arab League Summit, scheduled to begin today in Algeria. The newspaper says that the reason for the King's decision is related to the Arab League's refusal to adopt his proposal, by which the Arab states would normalize relations with Israel prior to a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. On Sunday, Yediot headlined: "Abdullah Presents: 'Peace Now.'" Jerusalem Post quoted senior diplomatic officials as saying Sunday that the Arab world is unlikely to take bold steps to normalize relations with Israel until it sees Jerusalem take "irreversible" steps. On Sunday, Jerusalem Post quoted PA officials in Ramallah as saying that the Palestinians are strongly opposed to Jordan's plan. On Sunday, Maariv reported that at a meeting in Geneva last week between Moroccan FM Mohammed Benissa and FM Silvan Shalom, Benissa told Shalom that Morocco is considering resuming its relations with Israel. Maariv also writes that last weekend officials in Vice Premier Shimon Peres's bureau hinted that talks are being held regarding a trip by Peres to Morocco.

Jerusalem Post cited harsh criticism of the PA by senior PA officials and academics, which has become commonplace among Palestinians following the death of Yasser Arafat.

On Sunday, Maariv cited optimistic forecasts for 2005 by IDF Intelligence officials.

On Sunday, major media cited reports published last week in the U.S. press, according to which Iran purchased long-range Cruise missiles from Ukraine in 2001.

Ha'aretz cited a denial by the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of a Maariv report Friday that it has any tangible information regarding the sale of its lands in the Old City's Jaffa Gate plaza in Jerusalem.

Leading media reported that four IDF soldiers who mistakenly ventured into the Al-Amari refugee camp north of Jerusalem were wounded, two of them seriously.

Summary:

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar opined in left-leaning, independent Ha'aretz: "If the day after the disengagement it turns out that 'Gaza-first' is also 'Gaza-the end,' the Europeans will once again attack us, the Arabs will recall their ambassadors, and the extremists of both nations will once again reign in the territories. Everything now depends on the President of the U.S., the only person with an influence on Sharon."

Liberal op-ed writer Ofer Shelach opined in the lead editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Ariel Sharon marketed [disengagement] as an obligatory step, but his motives and plans for the day after are still not entirely clear."

Liberal op-ed writer Ofer Shelach opined in an editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "The current U.S. administration's unqualified support for Israel's actions in the past several years ought not blind Israelis from seeing the danger inherent in a situation in which all of our political eggs are in a single basket."

Andrea Levin, executive director of CAMERA, Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America, wrote in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "A review of [National Public Radio's] coverage in early 2005 offers few signs of positive change."

Block Quotes:

I. "Now It's All Up To Bush"

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar opined in left-leaning, independent Ha'aretz (March 21): "Since U.S. President George W. Bush was sworn in for his second term, some of his greatest critics (including this writer) are wondering whether they were mistaken when they prophesied that the 43rd president would barely rate a footnote in American history, not to mention a place in world history. A recent series of appointments -- or to be more precise, the 'kicking upstairs' that has taken place in the top echelons of the administration -- seem to testify that the president no longer adheres to the neoconservative approach, which holds that what doesn't work by force, will work by greater force.... Even the Europeans who belittled Bush's vision of the Palestinian state, and the Arabs who believed that his demand for democratization in their countries was only a way out of realizing that same vision, are having second thoughts. Whether out of a desire to join the group that is turning out to be the victor, or whether from a desire to grasp the Bush vision, in the European Union and the Arab League there is a growing tendency to adopt the President's line.... If the day after the disengagement it turns out that 'Gaza-first' is also 'Gaza-the end,' the Europeans will once again attack us, the Arabs will recall their ambassadors, and the extremists of both nations will once again reign in the territories. Everything now depends on the President of the U.S., the only person with an influence on Sharon. On April 12, the day after the meeting with Sharon on the Texas ranch, we will know whether we have to apologize to George W. Bush."

II. "The Empty Square"

Liberal op-ed writer Ofer Shelach opined in the lead editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (March 20): "What conclusion can be drawn from the meager turnout at the demonstration in support of the disengagement plan Saturday night in Tel Aviv?.... Perhaps, and only perhaps this is what it is: despite all the talk about an historic initiative, the disengagement plan is not a vision being implemented. Ariel Sharon marketed it as an obligatory step, but his motives and plans for the day after are still not entirely clear. The plan will be executed because Sharon has enlisted the strongest mechanisms in Israel to that end. A majority of Israelis support it as a default choice, particularly after it has already gotten under way and the entire world stands behind it. But for a default choice and the operation of mechanisms only few people want to leave home on a Saturday night."

III. "World Importance"

Liberal op-ed writer Ofer Shelach opined in an editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot

Aharonot (March 20): "[President Bush's] candidate for American ambassador to the UN John Bolton, a neoconservative ... once said: There is no such thing as the United Nations, there is the international community that sometimes is subject to the leadership of the only superpower left in the world, and that, of course, is the U.S. Of all possible Americans, this is the man who Bush thinks will most faithfully represent the importance that the U.S. confers on the international organization, whose headquarters it hosts on its soil.... Israel perceives that organization as a kind of debate club that is devoid of any real content, to which we need to send our representatives with the best spoken English so as to deliver impassioned speeches. The U.S., conversely, is the master of our fate, a redeemer and a savior that needs to be shown the respect the peasant pays to his feudal lord. This view is something we ought to contemplate seriously, precisely when it seems that the United States' power is at its zenith. In the next few years a number of new powers will rise that will challenge the American hegemony: China, Russia, India and Europe, each with its own unique reasons for its economic and political might. Soon enough even the U.S. will not be able to do as it sees fit, and international coalitions will not be a luxury but a necessity. The current U.S. administration's unqualified support for Israel's actions in the past several years ought not blind Israelis from seeing the danger inherent in a situation in which all of our political eggs are in a single basket."

IV. "More Static on American Public Radio"

Andrea Levin, executive director of CAMERA, Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America, wrote in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (March 20): "It's fundraising season at America's National Public Radio.... NPR has earned a reputation for both the quality of its programs and for a long-standing bias against Israel. But is that now beginning to change? A review of its coverage in early 2005 offers few signs of positive change. Instead, the tilt toward the Arab narrative continues. Gestures of accountability, including sporadic corrections and quarterly self-examinations of its Middle East reporting amount to little more than PR damage control.... Americans who care about factual, balanced and unbiased reporting should keep this in mind when they're asked to send a check."

12. Iran: Nuclear Program:

Summary:

Aviation affairs correspondent Arye Egozi wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "The U.S. administration is no less worried than Israel regarding Iran's Cruise missiles.... The Iranians can use them to strike the U.S. forces deployed in the Middle East."

Block Quotes:

"The Americans Should Be Worried, Too"

Aviation affairs correspondent Arye Egozi wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (March 20): "Israel has every reason to be worried about the Iranian-Ukrainian missile deal: this is an upgrade of delivery systems in advance of the day Iran will have nuclear capability.... The U.S. administration is no less worried than Israel regarding Iran's Cruise missiles.... The Iranian Cruise missiles change the map of regional threats. The Iranians can use them to strike the U.S. forces deployed in the Middle East."

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